



US 8 - WIS 35 (N) to US 53 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Newsletter

**Transportation
District 8
March 2002
Newsletter Number 2**

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If you have any questions or concerns about this project, contact any of the above representatives.

Greetings...Thanks to those who responded to the US 8 Transportation Survey included in our first newsletter for the US 8 EIS project. We heard back from almost 2,000 of you – an excellent return that also shows how important the US 8 corridor is to the citizens of Polk and Barron counties. See below for survey results.

The Needs Assessment is the first stage of the EIS process and will be completed later this spring. The survey was just the first opportunity to hear from you on what major issues are of concern along this 40-mile roadway.

If you did not have a chance to voice your opinion in the survey, we have additional opportunities for you starting in just a few weeks. The first public information meeting will be on April 8th and community workshops will follow in May. Public participation is vital to the success of this study and we encourage you to get involved! See page 5 for more details.

We have had lots of good questions about why we are working on an EIS for a road that is under construction (in some parts). If this is a concern of yours, please see page 4 where we try to address these questions.

Transportation Survey Results

The nearly 2,000 survey respondents were a cross section of area citizens that typically travel on US 8 daily (57%) or every few days (19%). Respondents classified themselves in the following categories that were listed on the survey:

60%	Area resident
14%	Resident along US 8
8%	Area business owner
8%	Area farmer
5%	Business owner along US 8
2%	Farmer along US 8
18%	Other



Transportation survey shows that passing slow vehicles on US8 is very difficult.

When asked “Do you consider it difficult to pass slow moving vehicles on US 8?”, there was a resounding yes (89%). The “Yes” voters were asked when exactly is it difficult to pass. 76% said weekends, 58% said weekdays, 65% said during holidays, 71% said in summer and 44% said during winter.

When asked “How difficult is it to turn left onto US 8 or to cross US 8?”, 53% said it was difficult, 40% said it was somewhat difficult, and 7% did not believe it was difficult.

Ranking issues of importance in the village of Turtle Lake and city of Barron brought about interesting comparisons. The top two issues were identical for each community:

- 1st Biggest Issue = need for turn lanes
- 2nd Biggest Issue = traffic congestion at intersections.

Respondents thought Barron’s 3rd biggest issue was the need to deal with non-local truck traffic. For Turtle Lake, on the other hand, respondents thought the 3rd biggest issue was that there is not enough signalized intersections.

The complete ranking by issue and location is shown in the Urban Issues chart below.

Respondents were asked to fill in a blank to answer the following question, “If you could improve one thing along US 8, what would it be?” . 40 % responded “4 Lanes/Widen”. The list of most frequently made suggestions and numbers associated with the ideas are shown below.

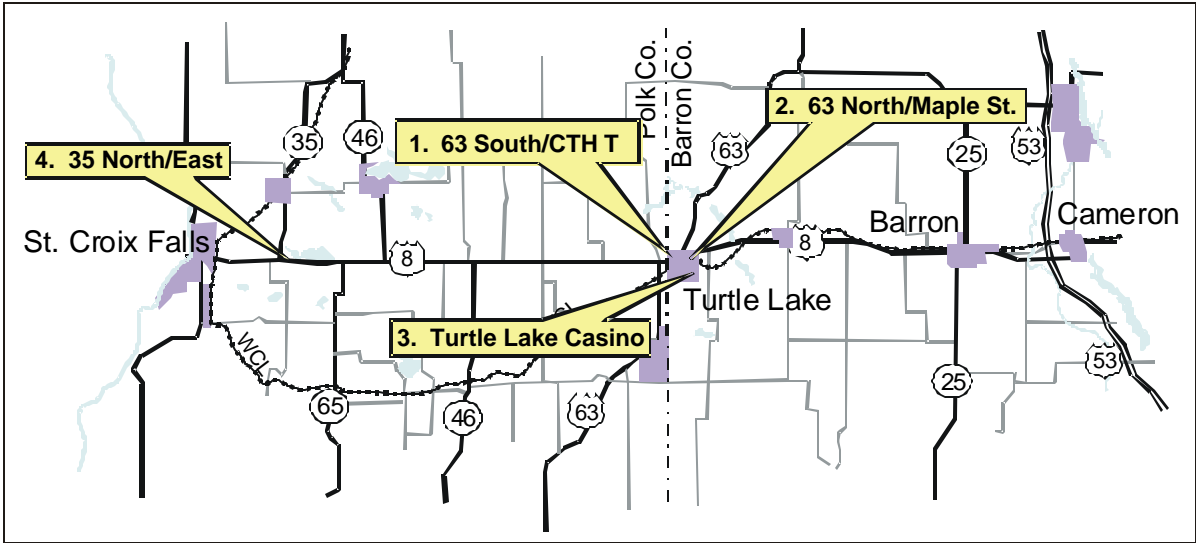
If you were to improve one thing on US 8, what would it be?

# of Respondents	% of Responses	Improvements
682	40	4 Lanes/Widen
256	15	Stop Lights
225	13	Bypass/Move South
208	12	Passing Lanes
199	12	Turning Lanes
144	9	Intersection Improvements
58	3	Enforce Speed Limit/More Police
46	3	Reduce Speed Limit
40	2	Casino Issues
32	2	Traffic Flow
25	1	Environmental/ Beautification
21	1	Move Away from Deer Lake

Turtle Lake Rating of Issues	URBAN ISSUES	Barron Rating of Issues
1	Need for turn lanes	1
2	Traffic congestion at intersections	2
3	Not enough signalized intersections	5
4	High speed traffic	4
6	Need to deal wth non-local truck traffic	3
5	Qualityof pedestrian facilities	6
7	Need for bicycle facilities	7

The survey also asked that people name specific intersections or segments along the corridor that they felt were not safe or need improvement. The locations named with most frequency were the following intersection with US 8: WIS 63/

County T, WIS 63 North/Maple Street and WIS 35 North. The Turtle Lake Casino was also named as a location that needed access improvements. The map below depicts the top four locations identified as needing improvement.



Top four locations identified as needing improvement.



The intersection of WIS 63 South/US8 is the location needing most improvement according to the survey.



The intersection of WIS 63 North/US8 is another location of concern.

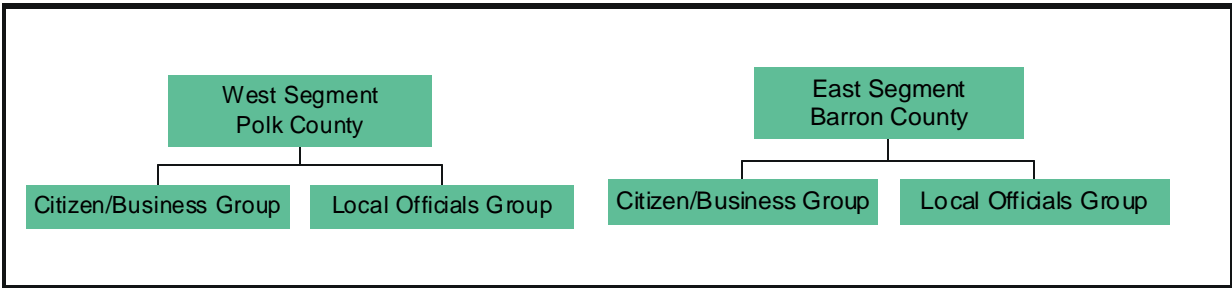
Focus Groups Identify and Prioritize Needs on US 8

In a presentation to WisDOT and local officials on January 10, 2002, four focus groups summarized their findings for the US 8 corridor. The 40-mile corridor was well represented with two of the groups consisting of local business owners, local employers, residents, farmers, and transportation providers and the other two groups of local and county officials. The focus groups' findings on corridor needs lay the groundwork for identifying long-term improvements that will be studied as part

of the environmental impact statement (EIS) process.

The mission of each focus group was to explore three major questions:

- What are the needs of US 8 users related to safety, access, mobility, land use, and environment?
- Who is responsible for meeting the needs identified? (local or state government, or can they collaborate)
- How should the needs be prioritized?



Safety was the number one concern.

Mentioned most frequently were the need for safer pedestrian and bicyclist crossings in Turtle Lake and Barron, better passing opportunities, safer road shoulders and safer intersections.

Sharing second place on the list of concerns were mobility and land use.

The focus groups recognized that mobility should provide safe and efficient travel for traffic passing through the area as well as local traffic. Concerns were stated that mobility also means accommodating higher weekend traffic

volumes. Changes to US 8 will have impacts on local businesses and this was a significant concern of many.

Finally, each group mentioned that the focus group process helped them understand how land use planning is essential for transportation development and that local governments (at the town, village, city and county level) are largely responsible for this planning.

Interested in looking closer at the focus group process and conclusions of the US 8 focus groups? Contact WisDOT project manager Dena Ryan or come to the April 8 public information meeting - see page 5.

“Help Us Understand”....Current Construction and other US 8 Projects

Many citizens wrote back to us in their transportation survey responses asking about current construction on US 8. People had two main questions:

- (1) *“Why isn’t WisDOT building a four-lane road as long as the construction crews are out there?”*

Jerry Mentzel, WisDOT District 8 Director responds to the first question, “State and federal laws require WisDOT to complete an intensive and lengthy environmental study process before a major change like a four-lane highway can be built. We began that study process last fall for the 40-mile stretch of US 8 between St. Croix Falls and US 53.” An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared to establish the long term need for improvements and recommend alternatives that meet those needs. It may be 2010 or later before construction of improvements could begin. Mentzel also noted, “the US 8 passing lane con-

struction projects underway address the immediate pavement resurfacing and safety needs on this stretch of highway.”

There are three US 8 construction projects that will address immediate safety needs by adding passing lanes and replacing sections of worn pavement. The project from 50th Street to US 63 and from Turtle Lake to Almena will be done in July 2002. The project from WIS 46 to 50th Street is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2002. Three passing lanes will have been added in each direction along US 8 when these projects are completed.

- (2) *“It looks like you had four-lanes almost built, then you took some of it away. Why?”*

In some sections of these projects it does seem like enough pavement for four lanes was constructed, and in some cases then removed! This was done to give the contractors room to work and keep US 8 traffic safely moving on temporary roads.

Update on Other US 8 Planning/Design Projects

A separate US 8 corridor study was completed this year for a 108-mile segment east of Cameron to US 51. WisDOT will use the study document to plan for future transportation improvements. A bypass of the village of Cameron is also proposed by WisDOT with design to start later this year. Depending on funding, construction for the Cameron bypass could begin in 2007.

Public Information Meeting To Be Held

The first public information meeting for the US 8 EIS will be held:

**Monday, April 8, 2002
Turtle Lake School District - Cafeteria
205 Oak Street North
Turtle Lake, WI
5:00 - 8:00 PM**

“Can I come anytime during the three-hour meeting time frame?”

Yes, you are welcome to come when it is convenient for you. Stay a few minutes or longer as you view exhibits, talk with WisDOT and consultant study team staff and see your neighbors and local officials. At 6 p.m., we plan to give a formal presentation about the goals and specifics of the US 8 study. The rest of the time, the format of the meeting is “open house”. We are interested in hearing your concerns and opinions and want to answer any questions you might have.

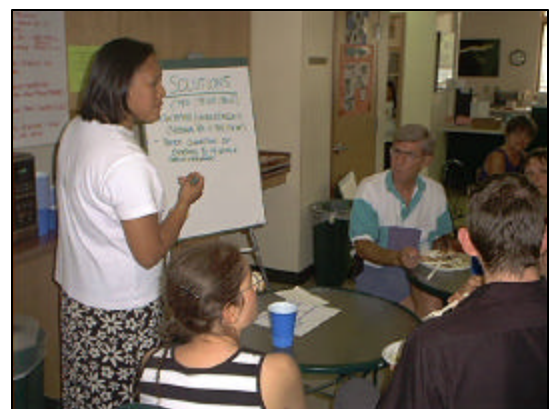
“What will I learn at the meeting?”

You will see exhibits at the meeting that include traffic and crash data, aerial mapping of the 40-mile corridor, and an illustration of how the EIS alternatives may be developed.

Find out what a “Visioning Workshop” is and sign up to participate later in May. See more detailed results from the work of the Focus Groups that took place from September-January. We hope to gain your input on community topics of US 8 corridor safety, environment, mobility, access, environment, and land use!

What’s Next?

After the public information meeting in April, “Visioning Workshops” are planned for May 2002. Residents, businesses, and local officials from communities where US 8 passes through will be invited to discuss local plans, identify problems with US 8 in the urban areas and generate concepts for corridor alternatives. The goal of the workshops is to consolidate US 8 issues and concerns to develop conceptual alternatives that meet the common goals of individual communities.

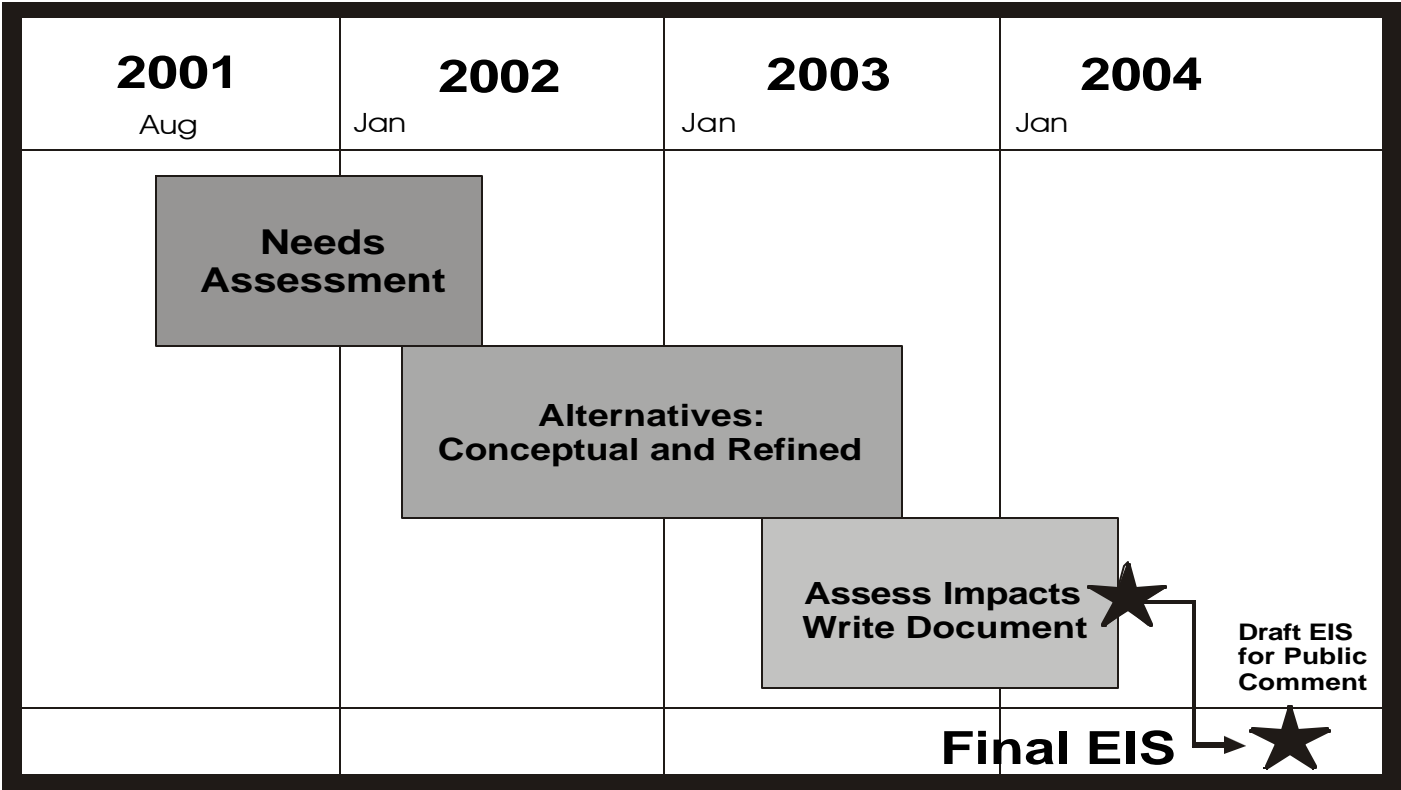


Participants in vision workshops include residents, business owners and interested groups.



The workshops are interactive, stimulate ideas and allow participants to find common interests and agreement for US 8 corridor alternatives.

**Learn more about the US 8 EIS at:
<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d8/eis/index.htm>**



US 8 EIS SCHEDULE

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